

Message Text

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46

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CU-04 AID-20 IO-14 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01

PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 USIA-15 ACDA-19 NIC-01 OMB-01

SY-10 A-01 OPR-02 COME-00 EB-11 LAB-06 SIL-01 DRC-01

/183 W

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R 131215Z DEC 73

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4165

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

CINCPAC

COMUSSAG

C O N F I D E N T I A L PHNOM PENH 13892

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, CB

SUBJECT: TEACHERS STRIKE IN PHNOM PENH

1. SUMMARY. TEACHERS IN EIGHT OF PHNOM PENH'S LYCEES
BEGAN A STRIKE ON DECEMBER 12 TO PROTEST HIGH LIVING
COSTS AND

INADEQUATE SALARIES. ACCORDING TO MINISTRY OF
EDUCATION OFFICIALS THE STRIKE SPREAD TO ALL BUT ONE OF
THE 18 LYCEES IN THE CITY TODAY. SO FAR THERE HAVE BEEN
NO DISTURBANCES OF PUBLIC ORDER AND STUDENTS, ALTHOUGH
SYMPATHETIC, HAVE APPARENTLY TAKEN NO ACTIVE ROLE IN THE
PROTEST MOVEMENT. THE PAST TWO DAYS ALSO SAW THE ELECTION
OF NEW STUDENT LEADERS AT TWO OF PHNOM PENH'S MAJOR FACUL-
TIES. END SUMMARY.

2. THE STRIKES APPEAR TO HAVE BEGUN IN A MORE OR LESS
SPONTANEOUS AND UNCOORDINATED FASHION FOLLOWING THE
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GOVERNMENT'S DECEMBER 9 ANNOUNCEMENT OF INCREASED PRICES FOR

PETROLEUM PRODUCTS. THE INCREASED PRICES RESULTED IN A SLOW-DOWN BY TAXI-BUS DRIVERS MAKING IT DIFFICULT FOR MANY STUDENTS AND TEACHERS TO REACH THEIR SCHOOLS. THOSE TEACHERS WHO DID ARRIVE AT WORK FOUND THAT MANY OF THEIR STUDENTS WERE ABSENT; WITH FREE TIME ON THEIR HANDS THEY APPARENTLY BEGAN TO DISCUSS THE SITUATION AND DECIDED UPON A FULL-SCALE STRIKE, WHICH SPREAD OVER A TWO-DAY PERIOD TO ITS PRESENT DIMENSIONS. THUS FAR NO CITY-WIDE ORGANIZATION TO DIRECT THE MOVEMENT HAS DEVELOPED AND ACTIVITIES APPEAR TO REMAIN CENTERED ON INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS WHERE TEACHERS ARE SIMPLY AWAITING SOME RESPONSE BY THE GOVERNMENT. THE PRESIDENT OF THE KHMER TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT WHILE HE HAS RECEIVED NUMEROUS PETITIONS COMPLAINING ABOUT INADEQUATE SALARIES FROM TEACHERS AND HAS PASSED THEM ON TO THE GOVERNMENT HIS ORGANIZATION IS NOT INVOLVED IN THE STRIKE MOVEMENT.

3. A MEETING OF ALL LYCEE PRINCIPALS WAS CALLED BY THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION ON THE AFTERNOON OF DECEMBER 12 TO DISCUSS THE STRIKE BUT NO DECISION ABOUT HOW TO DEAL WITH IT WAS MADE. THE DIRECTOR OF SECONDARY EDUCATION TOLD US TODAY THAT HE DOES NOT EXPECT ANY SIGNIFICANT RESPONSE BY THE GOVERNMENT UNTIL AFTER A NEW CABINET IS IN PLACE. THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR THE CITY OF PHNOM PENH, HOWEVER, SAID THAT TEACHERS AT ONE LYCEE HAVE AGREED TO RETURN TO WORK TOMORROW.

4. MEANWHILE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AT THE TWO MOST POLITICALLY ACTIVE FACULTIES (LETTERS AND LAW) ELECTED NEW LEADERS. ON DECEMBER 12 LOCH SOEUN, A WELL-KNOWN LEFTIST ORIENTED LYCEE TEACHER AND PART-TIME STUDENT, WAS ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE STUDENTS OF THE FACULTY OF LETTERS. LOCH SOEUN WAS AMONG THOSE ARRESTED AND HELD FOR SEVERAL MONTHS FOLLOWING THE STUDENT-TEACHER PROTEST IN MARCH OF THIS YEAR. AT THE LAW FACULTY, ON THE OTHER HAND, A RELATIVE UNKNOWN, NGUON KIM SENG, WAS ELECTED LARGELY BECAUSE ALL OF THE OPPOSING CANDIDATES WERE BELIEVED TO HAVE TIES WITH POLITICAL PARTIES AND WERE THUS DISTASTEFULLY TO THE NEUTRALIST ORIENTED STUDENTS.

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5. COMMENT: THE ATMOSPHERE AT THE MOMENT IS RELATIVELY CALM DESPITE THE TEACHER'S STRIKE. HOWEVER, IF THE STRIKE CONTINUES IT IS LIKELY THAT PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS, WHO SHARE THE GRIEVANCE OF THEIR LYCEE COMRADES, WILL JOIN THE MOVEMENT AND THERE ARE REPORTS THAT AN EFFORT WILL BE MADE TO ORGANIZE STREET DEMONSTRATIONS IN THE NEAR FUTURE. OF COURSE THE LONGER THE STRIKE GOES ON THE GREATER THE LIKELIHOOD THAT ORGANIZED ANTI-GOVERNMENT ACTIVITY, POSSIBLY

WITH THE INCITEMENT OF OUTSIDE FORCES, WILL DEVELOP.

6. THE GOVERNMENT IS AWARE OF THIS POSSIBILITY AND IN
ADDITION TO ITS COMMUNIQUE ON MEASURES TO ALLEVIATE ECONOMIC
PROBLEMS ISSUED YESTERDAY, A SPEECH BY PRESIDENT LON
NOL ANNOUNCING THAT THE OW GOVERNEMENT WILL RAISE SALARY
LEVELS WAS BROADCAST OVER THE RADIO LAST NIGHT. IN ORDER
TO AVOID ANY CONFRONTATIONS WITH STUDENTS AND TEACHERS
MILITARY FORCES IN PHNOM PENH HAVE BEEN CONFINED TO
BARRACKS.
ENDERS

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